

AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY

Impact from the COVID-19 Pandemic

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September 23, 2021

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Overview

- Introduction to the American Community Survey (ACS)
- Impact of COVID-19 on ACS Data Collection Operations
- Impact of Data Collection Challenges on 2020 ACS Data Quality
- Plans for 2020 ACS Data Products
- Questions

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The Foundation

The American Community Survey is on the leading edge of survey design, continuous improvement, and data quality

- The nation's most current, reliable, and accessible data source for local statistics on critical planning topics such as age, children, veterans, commuting, education, income, and employment
- Surveys **3.5 million** addresses and informs over **\$675 billion** of Federal government spending each year
- Covers **40+ topics**, supports over **300** evidence-based Federal government uses
- Typically provides three key annual data releases:
 - 1-year Estimates (for large populations)
 - 1-year Supplemental Estimates (for small populations)
 - 5-year Estimates (for very small populations)

The image shows the front cover of the American Community Survey questionnaire booklet. At the top right, the number 13191010 is printed. The U.S. Census Bureau logo is in the top left, followed by the title 'The American Community Survey'. A green-bordered box in the upper center contains the text: 'This booklet shows the content of the American Community Survey questionnaire.' Below this, a 'Start Here' section provides instructions on how to respond: online at <https://respond.census.gov/acs> or by mail. It includes a 'Your response is required by law' section explaining the survey's purpose and legal requirements. A 'If you need help or have questions about completing this form' section provides contact information for the Test Telephone (TTY) at 1-800-552-8330 and a Spanish-speaking line at 1-877-833-5625. The right side of the cover features a 'Please print the name and telephone number of the person who is filling out this form' section with fields for Last Name, First Name, and a 5D code. Below this is a section for 'How many people are living or staying at this address?' with instructions to include or exclude certain individuals and a field for the 'Number of people'. At the bottom, it says 'Fill out pages 2 - 7 for everyone, including yourself, who is living or staying at this address for more than 2 months. Then complete the rest of the form.' The bottom of the cover includes the form number ACS-11NFO(2021) and the Census Bureau's contact information.

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How is the American Community Survey Different From a Census?

ACS

Census

Purpose

Sample estimates

Official counts

Collects

Detailed social, economic, housing, and demographic characteristics

Basic demographics

Produces

Population and housing characteristics

Population and housing totals

New Data Every

Year

10 years

Data Reflect

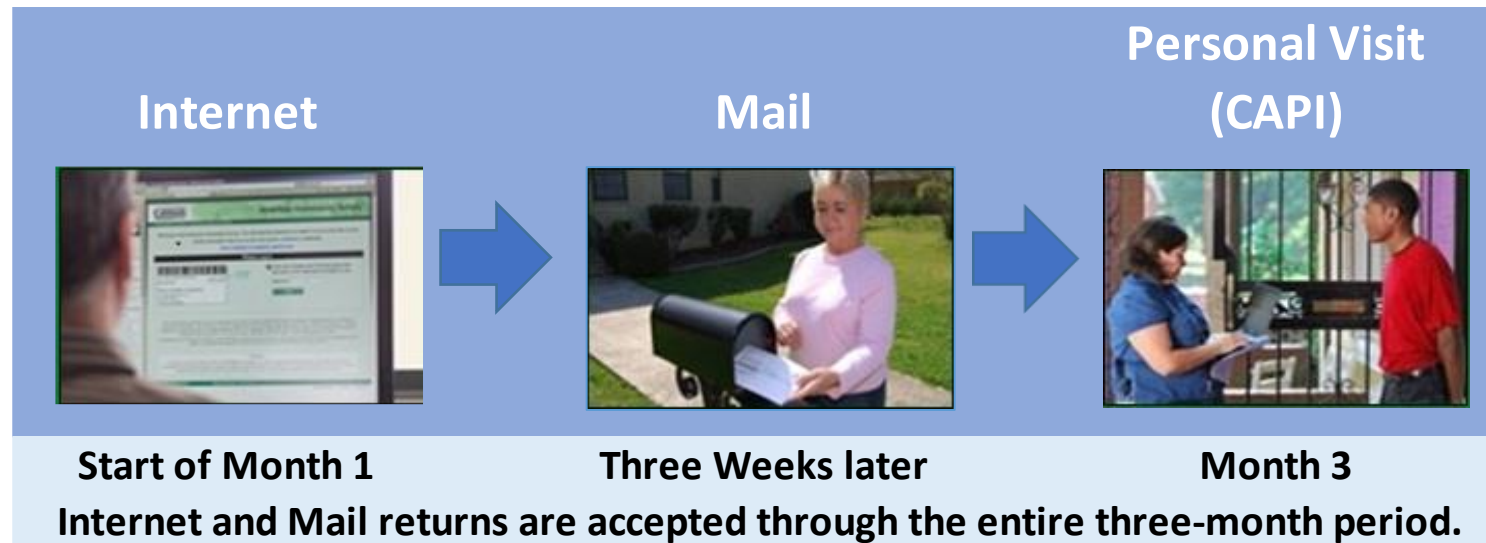
Period of time

Point in time

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ACS Data Collection Process

- The ACS is a continuous, multimode survey that uses a multiple mailing strategy
- Data collection for each monthly panel takes place over a three-month period



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Data Collection Modifications Due to COVID-19

Mail

- Suspended mail operations starting mid-March through June 2020
- Resumed limited mail operations in July 2020
- Restored our full 5-piece mail strategy in April 2021

Internet

- The internet option was available only to a subset of our full sample due to reduced mailings during April—June 2020

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Data Collection Modifications Due to COVID-19

In-Person Interviewing

- **Housing Units**
 - In-person interviewing was suspended mid-March—June 2020
 - Only telephone interviews were conducted during this period
 - In-person interviewing resumed for some areas in July 2020 and for all areas without stay-at-home orders in September 2020
- **Group Quarters (GQ)**
 - Suspended interviewing mid-March—June 2020 due to COVID-19 restrictions
 - Began in-person interviewing in July 2020, however some facilities continued to restrict access
 - Applied select use of administrative records

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Impact of Data Collection Challenges on ACS Data Quality

- The ACS is an ongoing survey that is designed to collect data for a new sample each month
- The ACS could not postpone nonresponse follow-up until after the peak pandemic months when it could be conducted in person, which led to a lower overall response rate and a less representative sample
- The 2020 Census was able to postpone their nonresponse follow-up until a time when they could carry out their full planned operation
 - This allowed the 2020 Census to mitigate the potential high nonresponse they would have faced had they continued their nonresponse operations during peak pandemic months
 - As a result, the 2020 Census could limit the effects of the pandemic on data quality in ways that the ACS could not
 - Overall, this translated into the 2020 Census being able to maintain higher quality throughout their data collection operations

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Impact of Data Collection Challenges on ACS Data Quality

- Given the limitations in our data collection for the 2020 ACS and our inability to fully utilize all three modes, we were unable to collect information from certain segments of the population
- As a result, significant nonresponse bias was present in the collected data
- All surveys typically have some nonresponse bias because those who do not respond tend to be different from those who do respond
- Our standard methods for mitigating the nonresponse bias are insufficient for this data year
- The 2020 ACS data collection had the lowest response rate ever for the survey at 71%, down from 86% in 2019 and 92% in 2018
 - This rate is an average across the entire data collection year
 - Response rates during the peak pandemic months were significantly lower

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2020 ACS 1-Year Experimental Data Products

The Census Bureau is committed to releasing quality data about America's people, places and economy

2020 ACS 1-Year Experimental

- Standard 2020 ACS 1-year data products will not be released because the data do not meet our statistical quality standards — <https://www.census.gov/about/policies/quality/standards/standardf1.html>
- An analytical report with more information on the data and related quality metrics will be shared
- The following experimental products will be released for research purposes:
 - Limited set of tables using experimental weights for limited geographic areas
 - Research paper explaining the experimental weighting methodology
 - Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) File containing experimental weights
 - Experimental weights will use methodology developed for the CPS ASEC last year, as described in [Coronavirus Infects Surveys, Too: Survey Nonresponse Bias \(census.gov\)](https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2020/cps-asec-experimental-weights.html)
- The 2020 Current Population Survey Health Insurance Report does not include 2020 ACS 1-year data

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2020 ACS 5-Year Data Products

2016-2020 ACS 5-Year

- Plan is to release the standard set of 5-year ACS products using our normal methodology
- Impact of nonresponse bias present in the 2020 ACS collected data on the 5-year estimates should be smaller
 - Approximately 6 months of the 2020 ACS data were strongly impacted to varying degrees
 - This represents one-tenth of the 5-year period as opposed to one-half of the 1-year estimates
- Thorough data review is being conducted in order to assess the quality of the 5-year data

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Schedule of 2020 ACS 1-Year Experimental Data Releases

2020 ACS 1-Year Experimental Release		
Data Products	Target Release	
Media Advisory, Webinar, and News Release	July 2021	✓
Analytical Report	October 2021	
Working Paper on Experimental Methodology	November 2021	
1-Year Experimental Estimates	November 2021	
1-Year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) with Experimental Weights	December 2021	

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Schedule of 2020 ACS 5-Year Data Releases

2016-2020 ACS 5-Year Standard Release		
Data Products	Target Release	
5-Year Data Products	December 2021	
5-Year Variance Replicate Estimates	January 2022	
5-Year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS)	February 2022	